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Special collections are undergoing a period of rapid change, as are the libraries of which they are often a part. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) decided in the late 1990s to study special collections at member institutions in light of changing demands and expectations from users, new technologies, and changing fiscal realities.

The purpose of this study is to offer an overview of the challenges facing special collections as presented by the ARL and to determine whether these challenges are also being experienced at smaller institutions that are not affiliated with a research library. To this end, the paper will present a case study of Special Collections at the University of North Carolina, Asheville (UNCA).

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SPECIAL COLLECTIONS—CHALLENGES AND CONTEXTS: A CASE STUDY

by
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Outline

I. Introduction

1. Overview

Special collections, largely unique repositories of primary research material, are undergoing a period of rapid change, as are the libraries of which they are often a part. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) decided in the late 1990s to study special collections at member institutions for the first time in a generation, in light of changing demands and expectations from users, new technologies, and changing fiscal realities. This study will examine the challenges facing special collections as presented by the ARL in the course of its work. Further, it will seek to determine whether these challenges are also being experienced at smaller institutions. Specifically, I will examine as a case study Special Collections at the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

In 2001, following publication of its 1998 survey, "Special Collections in ARL Libraries," the Association of Research Libraries formed a Task Force that was charged with advancing an action plan, the central element of which was to "promote special collections as a fundamental and indispensable part of the research library mission. . . ."[1] In doing its work over the following six years, work that has included the production of white papers, the convening of conferences, and the initiation and encouraging of conversations between library directors, educators, and special collection librarians alike, the Task Force identified several primary challenges facing special collections and has made recommendations regarding further action to be taken. If special collections were to remain healthy and, thus, maintain their fundamental position in the scheme of the modern research library, these challenges would need to be addressed.

That work began in earnest at a symposium held at Brown University in June 2001. Titled "Building on Strength: Developing an ARL Agenda for Special Collections," the purpose of the meeting was "to explore the prospects and promise of special collections in the expanding electronic environment." Generally, the symposium's goals were to "call attention to the unique role of special collections within research institutions," "find ways to use information technology more effectively to explore and expand the value to research and teaching of these resources," and "identify the factors that facilitate or impede the full realization of this potential in an electronic age."[2] From this meeting, the agenda or action plan for Special Collections was proposed. Beyond the basic imperative to "promote special collections," more specific issues were identified. Of primary importance was the problem posed by "hidden collections," the mounting volume of uncataloged, unprocessed, or underprocessed archival manuscript and rare book materials that are largely inaccessible, if not unknown, to researchers. Providing and enhancing access to these collections was identified at the symposium as a chief concern. The 1998 ARL survey of special collections reported that about 15% of printed volume collections remained unprocessed or uncataloged. For microforms, the figure was 13%. For manuscript collections, the mean for unprocessed portions of collections rose to 27%. Participating institutions reported 31% of university archives unprocessed. The numbers for video, graphic materials, audio, and artifacts were 35%, 36%, 37%, and 46%, respectively.[3]

The need to follow up on the work of the 1998 survey by continuing to gather data on special collections operations was another charge identified and accepted by the Task Force. Such ongoing statistical efforts would be essential in the development of measures for the evaluation of these collections. Providing support to the next generation of special collections librarians by defining the required core competencies was another item on the agenda. To that end, it was determined that the changing nature of the profession should be the subject of further research and that opportunities designed to develop professionals in the field should be created. The massive volume of 19th and 20th century materials presented a challenge that needed to be addressed, as well. A coordinated approach to the collecting and preservation of these materials was required. New formats and sources of archival data called for new solutions. Furthermore, it was noted that libraries should cooperate with each other by inventorying and mapping their collections, and, when appropriate, "define responsibility for collecting and preserving materials of all types."[4]

All told, the Proposed ARL Action Agenda of 2001 included eleven items. By the time the ARL Special Collections Task Force submitted its final status report in 2006, these eleven had been consolidated into seven points of action. Of these seven, one, aimed at coordinating the sharing of information regarding digitization efforts, was deemed not to be a priority, primarily due to the efforts of OCLC, the Digital Library Federation, and other organizations that had contributed to the development of standards and best practices. Another point in the plan called for the integration of the issues addressed by the Task Force into the agendas of the Society of American Archivists and other standing committees of the ARL. This point was reported as having been incorporated into all the Task Force's activities under the rubric of its mandate to work collaboratively and was dismissed with no further discussion. This left the five items mentioned above as the primary focal points that determined the work of the Task Force: promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library; enhance access to collections by "surfacing" hidden collections; gather data on special collections operations to advance the goal of describing, evaluating, and assessing special collections; support a new generation of special collections librarians and administrators by defining the required core competencies and by creating opportunities for those wishing to enter the field; and coordinate planning for collecting 19th and 20th century materials.

The state of special collections, generally, as these institutions have emerged from one century and embarked on a new one is a complex and broad state of challenge. (This is not a unique situation among areas of the library by any means, but the set of challenges facing special collections are in many ways unique.) It is also, as noted in the action agenda proposed at the Brown symposium, "a time when the traditional role and priority of special collections in the university library are being questioned."[5] The context in which the Task Force began its work was one in which the need to promote special collections and address a range of challenging issues might also be seen as an effort to secure the future of such institutions. The need to achieve adequate funding, though not identified as a specific item on an ARL agenda, is a condition that infuses every challenge that is undertaken. Funding is always a matter of justification, and in a time of budgetary constraint, when resources are thin at best, and particularly at many smaller institutions, choices about how and when to take on a problem, institute a change, accept a new mandate, or simply to decide on which, if any, situation can be addressed becomes a matter of finding a piece of a shrinking pie with ever more hands seeking funds.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is two-fold: first, to present an overview of the challenges facing special collections today and to focus on several of these issues as they have been presented in the ARL and other literature; second, to investigate how an individual repository—specifically a collection at a small university—goes about setting and addressing priorities in the areas of public access, service, and outreach given this landscape of urgent and contemporary challenges. To this latter end, the paper will present a case study of Special Collections at the University of North Carolina, Asheville (UNCA).

In choosing UNCA as the site of this study, its focus will be on a library that is not an ARL library. This has been done deliberately in order to offer insight into whether or not, despite institutional advantages and disadvantages that may certainly differ from those at larger research libraries, the challenges remain largely the same. Also, although the 1998 ARL survey of special collections reported only on ARL member libraries, the work of the Special Collections Task Force did, at various times, include other library groups. The Oberlin Group, an association of 80 selective liberal arts colleges, many smaller than UNCA, and including Berea, Reed, and Furman, but also Amherst, Smith, and Vassar, took part in the Task Force's "Survey to Identify Common Interests in Unprocessed Collections" in 2004. Also participating in that survey were a group of privately-supported Independent Research Library Association (IRLA) institutions. The University Libraries Group, a group of twenty-two mid-sized university libraries, and the seventy-eight member Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Library Alliance were also involved in some aspects of the Task Force's work. In choosing Special Collections at UNCA, however, I direct my attention toward a repository that is active on its campus and recognizably so. It has grown substantially in size and ambition over the last decade while adding to its reputation both on campus and in the wider local community. It is a department within the library at a university that is the only designated undergraduate liberal arts university in the sixteen-member UNC system and one of only six public universities in the country designated as a national liberal arts university.

II. Literature Review

Much of the literature pertinent to this project comes from the ARL or has been largely generated out of the effort the ARL has directed toward the challenges facing special collections. The following review will primarily consider the literature surrounding each of the major issues identified by the Task Force on Special Collections. Insofar as the development of the ARL concern is, itself, significant, the material will be presented in chronological context.

By the time the ARL conducted its survey of special collections in 1998, it had been almost 20 years since that organization had produced a similar survey. The 1979 survey, as reported by Panitch in 2001 had been prompted by the recognition that, "with mounting financial pressures and accountability, many libraries are faced with the challenge of justifying support for special collections materials."[6] In the intervening time, "neither ARL nor any other organization had undertaken a comprehensive, quantitative look at the status of special collections in research libraries."[7] The 1998 survey would then provide the impetus for and the basic ground upon which the ongoing work regarding the challenges facing special collections in a rapidly changing era would be based. Its intent, stated in the survey, was "to produce a snapshot of special collections in ARL institutions at the end of the twentieth century," to bring to light "some of the most pressing qualitative issues regarding special collections," and to present data that would "provide a common point of reference for future discussions about special collections."[8] Among the concerns identified by the survey was that of hidden collections, an issue that would become a major focus of the ARL agenda to come.

1. Hidden Collections

Hidden collections are those materials that are either uncataloged, unprocessed, or underprocessed and which, therefore, remain unusable and often invisible and unknown to potential users. The significant question concerning hidden collections is one of intellectual access to materials. As mentioned above, the 1998 ARL survey found a high percentage of uncataloged or unprocessed manuscript materials at responding ARL institutions. In addition to quantifying and drawing needed attention to this problem, the published results of the survey also suggested the presence of a situation that, if allowed to go unchecked, would only further inhibit access to a growing volume of material.

Conducted at a time when the internet was beginning to be integrated into operations at these institutions, the survey reported that only about 16% of archival and manuscript materials were represented on the internet via finding aids.[9] Yet by the time the report was published in 2001, Panitch could note that this situation had changed and that a growing emphasis on representing materials on the internet was evident. Though making collections available on the web was an important step towards making some materials accessible to a broader audience, this advance was contributing to an increasing backlog of unprocessed materials. As Panitch warns, "the survey data suggested a situation in which access to a very small selection of materials is being greatly enhanced by creation of digital surrogates, while much larger portions of collections still lack far more basic bibliographic access."[10] This lack of balance between the attention devoted to some materials and that devoted to others was not created by the growing emphasis on accessibility to materials via the internet, but it probably exacerbated the problem. By calling attention to this inequity in the context of the backlog of un-and underprocessed materials, Panitch points to a key thread that will remain throughout the discussions regarding hidden collections.

"Building on Strength"

While the results of the 1998 survey were being analyzed, the 1999 ARL membership meeting provided a forum for a broad discussion of issues concerning special collections. By January 2000, armed with a "confirmed interest in the development of an ARL agenda related to special collections,"[11] a planning group began to put together a meeting that would become the symposium *Building on Strength: Developing an ARL Agenda for Special Collections*, which would be held at Brown University in June of 2001. In his keynote address, David Stam (University Librarian Emeritus, Syracuse University) spoke in support of "more open access" to special collections as part of an urgent effort to further democratize these institutions. Of the problem of uncataloged and inaccessible materials, he suggested that it was being "passed over far too lightly," said that it was "perhaps the greatest obstacle to easy access and deserves far greater emphasis than the report conveys." He calls the amount of unprocessed material documented in the survey, "reprehensible" and suggests a reordering of priorities: "Exhibitions can help lead into the collections, but should they have the priority we give them? . . . Finding aids for unknown materials are surely a higher priority."[12]

Each of the presenters at the meeting echoed the concern over the backlog of unprocessed material. Sarah Thomas (University Librarian, Cornell University) picked up the theme of democratizing special collections, urging that collections be processed, that EAD be used, that simplification and standardization of the process was important, and that when it came to offering intellectual access to materials, "something is better than nothing."[13] In speaking to the problem, Robert L. Byrd (Director, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University) pointed out that some libraries were trying to cope with the problem by creating preliminary container lists at the time of acquisition, followed by an online catalog entry based on the accession record. He also, for reasons that include but are not limited to the elimination of backlogs, suggests that special collections reexamine their collecting focus, making sure that their collecting "be linked to a sense of identity, goals, ambitions, and academic programs of the university."[14]

White Paper: "Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers"

Following the Brown symposium, the ARL Board established the Task Force on Special Collections for the purpose of advancing the agenda produced by that meeting. In November 2002, a working group from within that Task Force released a white paper entitled, "Hidden Collections, Scholarly Barriers: Creating Access to Unprocessed Special Collections Materials in America's Research Libraries."[15] In this comprehensive paper, the group, led by Barbara Jones of Wesleyan University, initially and plainly labels hidden collections as a major problem at research libraries around the country and a major concern for the ARL. It goes on to describe the many dimensions of the problem and the specific challenges they present. It specifies the context of those challenges and the environment of the contemporary research library in which the definition of access would continue to change rapidly. Specific questions regarding the situation are formulated and addressed, while a series of recommendations are provided. Because of its pivotal importance as the first major ARL text to focus on the problem, this paper will be examined in some detail.

The stated purpose of the paper is to "provide helpful background for university library directors, funding agencies, and other decision makers who want a current, concise statement of the problem of unprocessed special collections backlogs in research libraries around the country." The authors describe the problem as large and complex, one that can best be addressed collaboratively at the national level. They also suggest that any solution will require an examination of current rules and practices for cataloging, arranging, and describing materials so that those rules and practices might be streamlined. Most of the working group agreed "that is it better to provide some level of access to all materials than to provide comprehensive access to some materials and no access at all to others,"[16] although they allow that more discussion on this point is needed. By the time the paper is released in 2002, however, there can be no doubt that this is a powerful and popular position, if still controversial.

While the 1998 survey quantitatively described the magnitude of the problem, the white paper does much to describe it. According to the paper, not only are un- or under processed collections inaccessible to the scholarly community, thus impeding research, they are at greater risk of being lost or stolen. It would also be difficult if not impossible to recover these materials if they were stolen, given their lack of documentation. If a researcher did suspect that an unprocessed collection might exist at a particular institution, the necessary burden of travel to that institution for the purpose of closer examination would further restrict access. The paper points out that as unprocessed collections, any knowledge of their contents would be entirely dependent on the expertise of staff, a resource that could be lost when those staff members leave or retire. Discovery of these materials by browsing would not be possible, as they would most likely be held in closed stacks. If the unprocessed collections include printed materials, duplicate purchases of these materials become possible. Donated materials that remain unprocessed and unavailable to researchers can become the source of poor donor relations, which may then affect an institution's future ability to obtain other materials. Furthermore, unprocessed materials are often lost or forgotten and may remain in less than ideal storage conditions, thus becoming damaged. If, on the other hand, these materials are discovered and used without being processed, they can become worn from too much handling due to the lack of proper finding aids.[17]

The paper asserts that electronic access must be an element of any solution to the problem of hidden collections. Special collections materials need to be integrated into a library's OPAC and available via the web. The authors point out that not only is cross-institutional research difficult and frustrating without electronic access but that, increasingly, materials that are inaccessible electronically are simply not being used. Access is described as the key to excellent service, as crucially tied to service, and given the worldwide nature of the service offered by research libraries, that access will have to be electronic.

Most of the paper, then, has to do with the question of access. The basic point, obvious enough, is that to make visible hidden collections is to provide access to them. But what kind of access? How much is enough? How does one measure user access need? Access for who? What are the most efficient ways to provide this access? How might the library community collaborate to achieve this agenda? What might a work plan look like? These are among the questions posed, and the paper approaches them along broad lines. In doing so, it becomes clear that the problem of hidden collections not only implicates a certain volume of material that must be made accessible, but that the manner in which special collections will continue to do their business, generally, is at issue, and that a clear view of the world in which these institutions operate—and will operate into the future—is required.

First, the assertion is made that demand on special collections has increased, increased from a more widely diverse user group and for a wider variety of services. This positive development, occurring in conjunction with many other positive developments such as EAD, Dublin Core, and other electronically accessible metadata standards; an increase in collaborative and consortial projects; and an increase in proactive outreach activities; among others; has resulted in a situation that has also created stress on already strained institutions. Second, the paper asserts that with these new patrons and new types of access comes the importance of providing the proper tool to offer the most satisfactory patron access for any given collection. Requiring a balance between economic realities and an ideal access record for every patron, the process of measuring access and services in order to determine how best to deliver that access and those services to users becomes necessary. Even with this information, there are many factors to consider when considering how much and what kind of access to provide. With regard to reducing backlogs, libraries should recognize that there “may well be different levels of access required for different types of collections in different institutions”[18] and that a solution that emphasized the streamlining of cataloging rules alone would not be sufficient. Local decisions regarding level of processing, the weighing of benefit gained versus cost involved, and priorities among collections to process would be required.

Seven recommendations emerged from the ARL white paper. Briefly, they are: 1) develop decision-making criteria for various processing levels and treatments; 2) To accommodate the transition from local individual catalogs to virtual, multiple-institution catalogs, follow national standards and guidelines for all cataloging, arrangement, and description, while allowing for local-level decisions at individual libraries; 3) provide a better balance between resources committed to purchasing materials and accepting gifts and those resources committed to processing and cataloging them; 4) Weigh carefully the balance between the level to which a book or collection is processed and the resulting impact on the public service staff; 5) Encourage institutional collaboration; 6) Develop different work flows for materials in various states of processing, that is, for example, between retrospective conversions and totally unprocessed collections; and 7) Any group developing the criteria for processing backlogs should include among its objectives an analysis of the reasons for the backlog in the first place.[19]

Before ending the paper, the authors make one other broad recommendation. They suggest that a national collaborative project is needed to process the backlog of hidden collections, that the problem is too large to be handled simply at the local level by absorbing the required effort into the routine work flow of any institution.

This project would work to develop a set of uniform guidelines of variable options that, while allowing local decisions, would still ensure usability of inter-institutional catalogs and online repositories. Second, it would examine ways to obtain and allocate available cataloging and processing resources. While a full-scale survey of backlogged materials was not supported, a pilot survey program involving a small group of institutions was considered to be useful in designing the next steps to be taken. Also, and toward that end, the authors refer to a conference to be held in the fall of 2003 at the Library of Congress for the purpose of discussing their paper and determining the best ways to proceed toward the reduction and elimination of the backlog. As the authors report, "the cost to scholarship and society of having so much of our cultural record sitting on shelves, inaccessible to the public, represents an urgent need of the highest order to be addressed by ARL and other libraries."[20]

Conference: "Exposing Hidden Collections"

A conference held at the Library of Congress in September 2003,"Exposing Hidden Collections" was planned by the ARL Task Force on Special Collections for the purpose of addressing this issue and to take a first step toward constructive action. In its summary of the conference, the ARL reported a consensus that "something must be done."[21] In her keynote, "Hidden Collections: The Elephant in the Closet," Carol Mandel (Dean of Libraries, NYU) left no doubt as to the urgency of the situation when she asserted that the backlog "is not a backlog because a backlog implies that there's a flow, and what we have here is an unexcavated well."[22] She also made several other assertions, which, taken together, she suggests, will help to formulate "a framework for processing." No single tool will solve the problem, but sustainable and searchable web access is one tool that must be used. Collaboration between catalogers and archivists will be a necessary element of any solution.[23] The problem, though national and international, will require local solutions. Planning should be based on a system of institutional responsibility that would include collaborative work across, as well as within institutions. Specifying much of what was suggested in the ARL white paper, Mandel promotes the idea of flexible, collection-specific solutions and points toward a range of new tools, including the development of EAD and digital libraries that will assist in the effort. Returning to one of the ARL's initial agenda items, she also notes that it is essential that special collections be recognized as a primary element of the research library and that, as such, reallocation of some resources will be required. Lastly, a strategy for making priorities among collections to be processed will need to be developed. As an example, she mentions a model developed by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania that assesses collection priority and determines appropriate processing. With regard to the matter of setting priorities, another speaker at the conference, Stanley Katz, a professor from Princeton, urged that archivists strengthen their associations with the scholars and teachers who are their primary users and who could lend an important helping hand.[24]

Katz also lent his support to the idea of having more collection-level records as opposed to fewer, more fully-processed records. This was a key theme throughout the conference and there was much discussion surrounding the proposition that conference participants should commit to providing "a web-accessible collection-level record for all unprocessed materials."[25] While consensus was not achieved on this point, progress was made insofar as the consequences of such an approach were being seriously discussed and the question of how to assist archivists in making this commitment was clearly being posed.

Consensus, however, was reached on the idea to encourage collaborative action among libraries and archives by promoting a shared commitment to improve access to materials displaying certain themes or subjects. One such example often mentioned was the huge problem of unprocessed or underprocessed pamphlets and printed ephemera. A recommendation was made to share information on unprocessed collections that would assist in the identification of such themes, subjects, and materials. Also following from the conference were recommendations to look for models regarding best processing practices, options for staff training and utilization, and organization of cooperative efforts; to view the description of content as a continuum, that is, to promote flexibility in selecting the standard to be applied to any materials while taking advantage of existing standards that can be applied to a wide variety of materials and needs; and to find funding either within one's institution, locally, or from national agencies by urging recognition of the value of making hidden collections accessible to users.

Beyond Conferring

In the wake of the September 2003 conference, several projects got underway to advance the Task Force's action agenda. Winston Tabb (Johns Hopkins University) distributed a survey in early 2004 designed to collect and share data on unprocessed or underprocessed collections representing various themes, formats, and time periods around which the effort to expose hidden collections could be focused. Results, it was hoped, would provide a framework for collaborative action among institutions while identifying areas that might appeal to funding agencies. In addition to inventorying materials in five areas—on the themes of either women or advertising, the format of pamphlets and printed ephemera, the period of 1865 to 1918, or highlighting ethnic histories or cultures—participating ARL, IRLA, and Oberlin Group institutions could indicate and briefly describe up to three collections in other areas they were eager to process. Initial conclusions suggested that "a project focused on collections relating to political activism and women's rights would be most likely to garner interest, support, and perhaps funding."[26] The next step would be to estimate the costs of providing a "preliminary record" for the 66 collections in this area, a MARC-based (and, therefore, OPAC compliant) format being developed by a Task

Force working group headed by William Garrison (Syracuse University Library). Garrision's group, investigating ways to streamline cataloging and processing, focused on the preliminary record as "a way to expedite processing and still provide adequate access to users."[27] Tabb also looks beyond this step towards two additional projects, the first providing preliminary records to more of the collections identified in the survey and the second involving "initiatives to preserve and digitize collections included in this initial preliminary records project."[28] Interestingly, at the beginning of the article in which he presents the survey findings, Tabb refers to the clear concern expressed at the 2003 conference that "by making a priority of digitizing and mounting selective collections on the Web, we were at risk of damning immense quantities of valuable, although perhaps less "sexy" research collections to remain forever unknown."[29] It would seem that the business of establishing priorities among competing avenues of access to materials and, therefore, in the competition for resources, remained a somewhat murky and difficult affair in 2004.

Other projects were also working toward solutions in three major areas, establishment of a preliminary record; development of a system for establishing priorities among collections; and rethinking, beyond the matter of a preliminary or minimal record, processing standards and methods that would allow a greater number of collections to be processed in less time. The 25 October 2004 Special Collections Task Force Meeting summary reports that as a result of conversations with William Garrison, information about minimum records was included in the Society of American Archivist's new *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. The same summary states that Duke, Wyoming, and Yale were already processing some collections by creating accession level preliminary MARC records that would be available to researchers through bibliographic utilities. Although participants at the meeting acknowledged that convincing a majority of archivists to offer a simple accession level record prior to a complete processing of a collection would be a major battle, they did agree that the security risks of making a collection available with this level of processing did not present a significant security risk, thus taking issue with what had been an earlier objection.[30] Elizabeth Yakel, in an article published in early 2005, highlights a project in which Columbia University Libraries refined, tested, and validated the assessment model developed by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. She reports that Columbia went on to incorporate the model, which can rate and establish priorities of collections according to access, condition, and value, into their daily practices and activities.[31]

Greene and Meissner

Noted in both the 25 October 2004 Task Force Meeting and Yakel's 2005 article is the project conducted under a National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant by Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner. Entitled "More Product, Less Process: Pragmatically Revamping Traditional Processing Approaches to Deal with Late Twentieth Century Collections," their work examined the reasons why the backlog of unprocessed collections had and were continuing to accumulate and, more specifically, explored the proposition that contemporary processing approaches "fail to address the reality of large modern collections." Among the goals of their research was to make recommendations aimed at "changing the way archivists define—and define for their constituents—what 'processed to accepted archival standards means,'" "changing the way modern archives and manuscripts collections are processed," and "changing the accepted standards for processing rates."[32] Their findings, which include an understanding of what the "standard" processing rate for non-governmental collections is in the U.S. today, support an approach that combines the creation of minimal cataloging records with streamlined processing procedures. Greene and Meissner maintain that most item-level conservation and arrangement work, which accounts for the majority of processing time, should be eliminated. It would take place only in exceptional instances and, particularly in situations involving a grant, only with specific justification. With regard to item-level conservation, such as refoldering, removing metal fasteners, interleaving with acid-free paper, they found "that there is no consistent preservation ethos at work, but rather a disjointed and haphazard dedication to certain rituals."[33] On arrangement, they suggest, "much of what passes for arrangement in processing work is really just overzealous housekeeping, writ large."[34] Furthermore, they demonstrate support for their recommendations both in the literature and in practice, while providing tangible support for the idea that in order to maximize access to users, it is better to provide some level of access to all materials than to provide comprehensive access to some materials and no access at all to others. They also make clear that it is time to "get on with it."

"More Product, Less Process" in Practice

The idea of employing "minimum standards" for processing did not originate with Greene and Meissner. In May 2001, Thomas Hyry and Christine Weidman (Yale University Libraries) delivered a paper called "Minimum Standards—Maximum Value" at the Midwest Archives Conference. In August 2004, Hyry presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) entitled, "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Backlog: Using Minimum Standards and Appraisal to Process Modern Collections." The allusion to *Dr. Strangelove* may have only exaggerated somewhat the magnitude of the subject while leaving the appropriate ironic sensibility intact. As noted in the October 2004 Task Force Meeting Summary, even though participants at that meeting agreed with the overall assessment offered by Green and Meissner, they also believed that "broad acceptance and buy-in" of the methods they professed would likely be difficult.[35] By the time Greene and Meissner's work had been published in the Fall/Winter 2005 issue of *The American Archivist* (with a shortened subtitle, "Revamping Traditional Archival Processing"), the notion of minimum standards had been a topic for discussion among the archival community for some time. But even with hesitation on the part of many archivists, "More Product, Less Process" has done more to move the conversation along, initiate more widespread change in practice, and add credibility and detail to the argument. It also appeared at a time when the imperative to address the issue of hidden collections had achieved a greater significance of its own.

Approximately a year after Greene and Meissner's article was published, two articles appeared in the Fall/Winter 2006 issue of *The American Archivist*, each of which had first been presented at the previous annual SAA meeting in August 2005 and each of which demonstrate practical application of Greene and Meissner's processing methods. Christine Weideman, in "Accessioning as Processing," writes that "More Product: Less Process" provides "a foundation for understanding how the impossible can actually be accomplished" and that the analysis she presents "serves as a case study of application of the Greene and Meissner recommendations."[36] In "Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana," Donna E. McCrea describes her approach to processing in the face of a backlog that equaled one-fourth of her repository's total holdings. That approach was "largely inspired by the recommendations of Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner" and "resulted in a decrease in both processing time and in the backlog of unprocessed collections."[37]

McCrea reports that she now assumes minimal processing will be the standard for her collections—no item level preservation, no searching for duplicates, little or no rearrangement of materials, a minimum of description. Decisions concerning processing continue to be made on a collection-by-collection basis, even series-by-series, but it is a rare instance when time and resources are devoted to more intensive arrangement and description. The idea that minimally processed collections will be revisited at some future date is no longer entertained. Typically, a minimal finding aid is created that will map to a MARC record and the collection is added to the OPAC, WorldCat, etc. EAD is in the offing. Are users satisfied? McCrea suggests that she is "addressing the needs of the users by moving collections out of the backlog and into their hands."[38] The change in processing procedures has also altered the way she speaks to donors and potential donors. A discussion of making materials available to users in a timely fashion and the importance of storage in a temperature and humidity controlled space is emphasized and no mention is made of acid-free folders. She quotes Greene and Meissner's admonition that archivists "must distinguish what we really need to do from what we only believe we need to do" and their language, which stresses getting materials to users, taking minimal steps to physically preserve materials, arranging materials adequate to user needs, and describing materials sufficient to promote use.[39]

Weideman's article describes a process in place at Yale that takes Greene and Meissner's recommendations and standards a step further by applying them during accessioning. (The idea of establishing physical and intellectual control over materials at the time of accessioning was not new and was, in fact, mentioned by Robert L. Byrd in his address to the Brown symposium as an approach taken by some libraries.[40]) The use of minimum standards alone, employed for several years at Yale, was not adequate to reduce the backlog of materials and allow the staff to keep up with incoming collections. Not only was the volume of unprocessed and incoming materials too great, but archivists who used to spend their time processing were now also involved in a range of other activities, EAD reconversion, digitization projects, preparing for electronic records, and many others. As she writes, "Accessioning as processing is now the goal in Manuscripts and Archives."[41] In this way, new collections never enter the backlog. No new collection, once accessioned, is ever "hidden." This process, as Weidman describes it, begins at the point of the first substantial conversation with a donor regarding the materials themselves. The process of arrangement and description is described. Limitations with respect to the level of description are explained. Item-level arrangement is not discussed. As McCrea noted in her article, preservation is explained in terms of where and the conditions under which the materials would be stored. More importantly, after offering this brief education about the work of the archives, Weideman invites the donor to actively participate in the preparation of the materials:

> When the donor describes a sizable amount of unorganized material, I begin a conversation about what can be done with it. I discuss what the ideal would be and, if we are not going to do it, I explain why and what we will do instead. The whys almost always have to do with lack of resources or the time-consuming nature of the work. On several occasions during the past year, this kind of conversation led donors to do the "ideal" themselves, or a variation of it before turning the materials over to us.[42]

She routinely now asks donors to write all or some of the series descriptions. Accessioning takes longer than it used to, but the result is often a collection that is research-ready much more quickly. Lastly, and again in concert with the recommendations of Greene and Meissner, Weideman emphasizes the importance of flexibility and creativity in thinking about arrangement and description. No one solution will work for every situation, or, necessarily, for an entire collection. An aspect of recognizing this importance is also acknowledging that there are consequences to these new actions. A consequence of meeting the obligation to eliminate backlogs is an undeniable shift of a burden onto researchers and, in the instance described by Weideman, to donors. It also implies a willingness to explore new options, test new methods, weigh the consequences of those methods, and share results with colleagues.

Conclusion: Hidden Collections

In July 2006 the ARL Special Collections Task Force issued its final report. Along with four specific recommendations for action regarding hidden collections, the report suggests that a small time-limited task force be created to continue work "on strategies that accelerate the identification and accessibility of hidden collections" and that such work "address all types of hidden collection: archival, rare books, audio, video, and other media."[43] Of the specific recommendations, the first encourages the testing and use of a preliminary record format to quicken the exposure of these collections. The second supports further collection mapping to uncover collection strengths and gaps and to identify hidden collections. Third is the recommendation to connect the exposure of hidden collections to the ARL's priority for research, teaching, and learning by "demonstrating how such projects can provide opportunities for faculty and student collaboration, as well as training for library school students." Support of collaboration with Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) libraries in order to expose hidden collections among their institutions and in support of training and education in special collections was the fourth recommendation.[44] On 23 February 2007, the newly established ARL Working Group on Special Collections published the agenda with which it had been charged. Among its priorities was to encourage "collection analysis, identification of gaps, coordination, and use of a "preliminary record" for identifying and making accessible otherwise hidden collections." The document also mentioned that the group may wish to contribute to the development of measures for the evaluation of special collections, which might include a target for surfacing hidden collections along with mechanisms for tracking progress.[45]

2. Core Competencies and Creating Educational Opportunities

As Alice Schreyer wrote in her 2004 ARL white paper on education and training for careers in special collections, "The success of the Task Force's 'Hidden Collections' initiative to expand access to unprocessed materials will depend upon the availability of a sufficient pool of trained staff who are committed to this goal."[46] Concern about developing the next generation of special collections librarians was another item on the agenda of the ARL Special Collections Task Force, evident in that group's charge to "define core competencies among special collection librarians and create training opportunities."[47] The concern was, of course, directed at more than simply the problem of hidden collections. The matter of the future of the profession, as with the issue of hidden collections was discussed at the Brown symposium in 2001; was an item on the Task Force action agenda; the subject of a Task Force white paper and meetings both prior and subsequent to release of that paper; and the basis for a growing body of literature. Much of that literature focuses on one or more of the following dimensions of the matter: articulation of a needed skill set or sets for special collection librarians; a description of the current landscape of the profession; discussion of the changing expectations of the profession and its practitioners, as well as the strategies required to meet changing requirements; and projection into the future of what special collections may look like beyond the short term.

In November 2003, the Special Collections Task Force sponsored an invitational working meeting to specifically consider issues related to recruitment, training, and education for careers in special collections. As in other areas of librarianship, special collections faced a large wave of retirements in coming years among its highly experienced professionals. The 1998 ARL survey of special collections also indicated that professional vacancies would increase in the five years following the survey. Library directors were reporting difficulty finding acceptable candidates to fill mid- and senior level positions, making a shortage of new professionals ready to assume leadership positions apparent. This situation, combined with a limited number of available entry-level jobs and a decrease in formal training opportunities even as the nature of special collections librarianship changed posed a serious problem for the profession. What individual qualifications, academic, professional, and personal were needed to address this problem? How could individuals with appropriate backgrounds be recruited and prepared to meet the new and rapidly changing need? Possible solutions ranged from increasing opportunities for career development and attracting to special collections careers individuals with advanced (non-library) degrees, to the development of a program of internships or residency programs. A preliminary list of both general and specific competencies was drawn up, but the suggestion was made that a more complete report on this matter might more appropriately come from the Rare Books and Manuscript Section, ARCL/ALA (RBMS). Generally, building strong partnerships with other institutions such as SAA, Rare Book School (RBS), Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE), and Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), among others, was encouraged and seen as an avenue to pursue toward the goal of creating new opportunities. Broadly speaking, the needs identified were to increase an ability to identify and understand potential candidates for professional positions; review and assess models and existing initiatives to prepare individuals for careers; plan for ways to allow individuals, once active in the profession, to continue to build their careers; prepare a program of evaluation to assess ongoing efforts. The group agreed that a white paper should be drafted to further identify and articulate pertinent issues. Lastly, after noting that the group had not discussed these issues as they relate to undergraduates, several initiatives were discussed.[48]

In October 2004, the Task Force met to report on its own activities. Under the heading of "Education and Training for Special Collections," two topics were discussed. Elizabeth Yakel reported on the progress of A*CENSUS, an SAA-led, IMLS-supported project to conduct the first broad national survey of archivists in nearly thirty years. Having contacted some 12,000 people and received over 5,600 responses, the survey would seek to provide a detailed picture of the profession and its practitioners in the first decade of the 21st century. Among other goals, it sought to determine the knowledge and skills necessary for archivists to do their jobs currently and in the future and to provide education programs with data to support recruitment and training of new archivists. Though the results of A*CENSUS, published in the Fall/Winter 2006 issue of *The American Archivist*, are beyond the scope of this investigation, the report confirms that the profession is on the brink of a major transition and that the data presented will help us “to understand how the profile of archivists in the United States is changing and how to prepare for the coming changes.”[49] Also on the mind of the participants at the October 2004 meeting were questions regarding the relative and competing merits of subject area expertise versus archival knowledge in the archivist of the future, given a blurring of the traditions represented by each view. It was noted that while providing archival training to scholars had been the topic of much discussion, little had been said about creating opportunities for archivists to acquire subject area expertise.[50]

Schreyer’s white paper, “Education and Training for Careers in Special Collections” was released in November 2004 to respond to what the paper termed “an emerging crisis.”[51] Confirming much of what was reported at the November 2003 meeting, the paper had three primary tasks: to consider the scope of the profession’s need, to survey the current environment, and to propose strategies to address the need into the future. In the first instance, recruitment, education, and training of special collection librarians is, as Schreyer reports, needed at all levels. This would include advanced and dual-degree holders, mid-career librarians, and career-changers. In view of the limited number of entry-level positions available, graduate and post-graduate internships and/or fellowships are recommended to provide experience. New initiatives such as the ARL Academy program and the CLIR Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Scholarly Information Resources for Humanists are mentioned as notable examples, while new cooperative arrangements with existing programs, including Rare Book School at the University of Virginia are discussed, as well. The paper also calls for a "more aggressive use" of continuing education opportunities for those already employed in the profession. But the profession is, as Schreyer reminds us, changing rapidly. Expectations of special librarians are changing as archival processing is being rethought and other activities such as instructions, outreach, and interpretive services become more important. Of course, new technologies, especially with regard to digital collections, demand new roles and responsibilities for individuals working in special collections. Use of special collections was increasing and users were becoming more diverse. Given this changing landscape, the paper reiterates the need to make a statement regarding the core competencies required by special collection professionals and it provides a working list. The paper also stresses the need for multiple, flexible avenues to education and training, as well as focused attention directed to projects such as A*CENSUS, which are expected to reveal additional needs of the archival profession.

A major step toward the articulation of core competencies for special collections librarianship was taken 1 June 2006 with the release of a draft document by the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, ARCL/ALA, Task Force on Core Competencies for Special Collection Librarians. Begun in 2005, this RBMS project involved a review of related statements, guidelines, articles, position titles and job responsibilities, and a survey distributed to RBMS members. In the introduction to the document, RBMS refers to Schreyer's white paper and to many of the same rapidly changing aspects of the profession that make such an enumeration of competencies desirable. Also mentioned are the increasingly diverse environments in which special collections professionals work, the blurring of the lines between technical and public services work, and required expertise in other areas, including fundraising and rights management. In comprehensive fashion, the document first lists seven key areas that are fundamental to the work of all professionals working in special collections. It then lists eleven specific areas, each of which is accompanied by a list of pertinent competencies. The eleven areas are: reference and access services; teaching and research; collection development; promotion and outreach; management, supervision, and administration; preservation, conservation, collection management; technology; technical services and cataloging; manuscripts and archives; rare books; professional development and professional service. The seven key areas are:

> Understanding of the history, theory, and professional practices relating to materials generally found in special collections research libraries, including rare books, archives, manuscripts, and photographs, as well as audiovisual media and digital materials
>
> Understanding of the nature and value of primary research and the significance of original artifacts
>
> Familiarity with the history of books and printing and the history of libraries and archives
>
> Understanding of the security and preservation needs of original objects, both in storage and during use
>
> Ability to engage audiences with the excitement that original materials can inspire by providing a direct connection with the past
>
> Commitment to promoting the appreciation and use of special collections materials to appropriate audiences
>
> Ability to work successfully within the framework of a larger organization, whether a research library or archive, historical society, or private institution

As the draft warns, "The list of competencies in this document assumes a professional who gradually achieves such general proficiency over the course of his/her career; full mastery in all areas, however is by no means expected."[52]

In its last recommendation in its final report dated July 2006, the ARL Task Force on Special Collections urged that attention continue to be directed toward the work of the RBMS Core Competencies Task Force and that a future ARL special collections group "should review the document they are producing and endorse it, if appropriate."[53] This recommendation is also listed among the General Issues in the charge to the new ARL Working Group on Special Collections, dated 23 February 2007.[54]

Bridging the Gap: Education and Special Collections

In June 2005, the RBMS held its annual Preconference on the topic, "Bridging the Gap: Education and Special Collections." The issue at hand was "the rift between the growing variety of educational roles played by special collections librarians—as teachers, advocates, interpreters, impresarios—and the shrinking opportunities for formal training and continuing education available to prepare special collections librarians for these roles."[55] This is, in large measure, the issue addressed by the ARL Task Force. Alice Schreyer, author of the ARL white paper, presented at the conference and the work of the Task Force was mentioned by several of the presenters. Two of the papers presented warrant closer attention because of their difference from the ARL material. Rather than focusing primarily on the current "gaps" and the measures required to stabilize a crisis and allow the profession to move in a prepared fashion into the future, the papers of William Landis and Steven Smith prefer to imagine the future first, then think about requirements for moving in that direction, then consider those requirements in terms of today's context.

Landis, in "Personas and Archetypes: Envisioning the 21st-Century Special Collections Professional," wants to "figure out a creative way to avoid constraining future possibilities with too narrow a focus on the past and present." Imagining special collections twenty, twenty-five, or even fifty years from now, what proportion of change and stasis might we see? He asks how different would working at a large research institution be from working at a small undergraduate-focused college; from working to maintain, expand, and promote collections of international significance versus developing collections whose importance is primarily local or regional?[56] He suggests an approach to these questions and others like them by imagining "an ideal professional colleague in 2020." He gives her a name, an educational and employment history, a position, and responsibilities. As persona, she embodies the characteristics and skills required to perform her job successfully and imaginatively. Landis suggests that an exercise such as this might help bring into focus a composite and collective vision of a future special collections professional and the skills needed to move us towards that vision. A set of such personas could "account broadly, but comprehensively, for all the specializations and situations we can think of to hang on an envisioned special collections repository in 2020.[57]

Smith takes a different approach in "From 'Treasure Room' to 'School Room': Special Collections and Education" by beginning with a vision of what special collections should become. Noting the increasing interest in special collections and the attention devoted within the profession to hidden collections, Smith suggests that special collections materials, whether cataloged or not, remain hidden to the great majority of people who are or might be interested in them. Although acquiring, cataloging, and preserving materials are, and must remain, core activities of special collections, for Smith the commitment to teaching and outreach must be deepened. He asks us to imagine "a special collections library organized not around collections, but around teaching and learning." He asks:

> What would our libraries look like if education were the first thing that we funded—or at least not the last? How would our operations be organized? How would our staff be distributed? How would our collections be deployed? And how would all these things differ from our current arrangements?[58]

Smith offers answers to these questions and invites us to consider whether with this greater commitment to education and outreach we would, by building collections for teaching purposes, also discover that we were building research collections. Teaching and learning would become a greater part of our vocabulary. Collaboration between special collections, academic departments, and museums would increase. New positions with different responsibilities would emerge. In reality, Smith is not calling for the profession to abandon an orientation that emphasizes support for research, but suggests that a greater emphasis on teaching would help us better serve our larger organizations and, perhaps, society as a whole. To not make education and outreach more of a priority risks, in Smith's words, "our most important capital—an enlightened, engaged, and supportive public."[59]

3. Measurement and Assessment

William J. Crowe, referring to the kinds of statistics the ARL had collected in the past, reminded the attendees at the 2001 Brown symposium that "[t]hese data may answer some questions, but more often, they allow us to ask better questions."[60] Following the publication of the 1998 Survey on Special Collections and seeking both answers and better questions, the Task Force on Special Collections made the establishment of an ongoing statistical effort one of their major action agenda items. Specifically, the agenda called for the effort to "focus on the gathering of core longitudinal data on an annual or biennial basis, as well as on occasional special efforts as needed. . . ."[61] By the summer of 2003, Joe Hewitt and Judith Panitch reported that although a proposal for collecting data to track special collections operations was a Task Force priority, and interest in such a statistical project was high, no acceptable proposal had yet been prepared.[62] At the 25 October 2004 meeting of the Task Force, the initiative to develop a measurement and assessment plan had still been deferred, but Beth Yakel (University of Michigan) had been invited to the meeting to discuss work that she, Wendy Duff (University of Toronto), and Helen Tibbo (University of North Carolina) had begun in this area the previous year.

Yakel, Duff, and Tibbo led a project titled, "Describing Archival Use and User Metrics," which had been awarded a Mellon grant in December 2003. Associated with AX-SNet (Archival Excellence in Information Seeking Studies

Network) and focusing on archives in academic settings (beyond ARL-member institutions), their research sought to "explore the feasibility of establishing standard metrics for use and user services."[63] The initial goals of the project were to demonstrate that archivists could agree on the need for basic metrics, on the approaches to take towards achieving these measurements, and that they would agree to be partners in an ongoing effort. The eventual goals were to develop standard evaluation tools that would allow comparable institutions to compare measurements, to determine best practices, and to set standards for service—to develop reliable information on use and users that would improve service and access for patrons.

The requirement to show a consensus among a broad range of archivists that these kinds of measurements were needed is not surprising. Two early studies on use and users in archives, both published in 1986 and both considered "classics" of the literature are Paul Conway's "Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives," and William Maher's "The Use of User Studies." Both call attention to the reluctance on the part of archivists to develop a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of their users and the importance of doing precisely that. Each article outlines a methodology or framework for structuring user studies and urges the regular analysis and sharing of data. (The general library community has gotten an earlier start and more consistent approach to the matter of user studies. See, for example, Denise Troll Covey's CLIR publication, *Usage and Usability Assessment: Library Practices and Concerns*.) Generally speaking, the literature on use and users in archives is wide and varied. Closely related to the matter of user studies is the issue of outreach. More accurate information about archival users and the ways in which they contact and use an institution's materials can lead to more effective outreach. Two pieces from a 1997 issue of *Reference Librarian*, Dearstyne's "Archival Reference and Outreach: Toward a New Paradigm" and Gracy's "Reference No Longer is a 'P' Word: The Reference Archivist as Marketer" articulate a more active view of outreach than had previously been accepted. Other articles, such as Yakel's "Listening to Users," and Katharine Salzmann's "'Contact Us': Archivists and Remote Users in the Digital Age," discuss the role and value of various means of communication between archivists and users. Closer examinations of the ways users interact with archival materials online are offered in Andrea Rosenbusch's early "Are Our Users Being Served?: A Report on Online Archival Databases" and Christopher J. Prom's "User Interactions with Electronic Finding Aids in a Controlled Setting." Notable also, is Mark Greene's 1999 paper "The Existential Archivist: Use as a Measure of 'Better' Appraisal," from the Society of American Archivists, which connects the need to be aware of the ways an archives is used with an archivist's ability to better perform the important task of appraisal. These references represent only a sample of a broad body of work on the topic of use and users in archives.

Developing Archival Use and User Metrics, June 2004

To meet the initial goals of their project, Yakel, Duff, and Tibbo organized a working meeting to be held in June 2004 that would bring together archivists and curators to discuss developing standardized metrics for assessing use and user services. Two questions provided the most basic framework for the meeting: "What should we measure?" and "How should we conceptualize measurement, both locally and in a broader sense." Four desired outcomes were also proposed. These were to identify: 1) critical areas of measurement, such as archival reference desks, descriptive tools, and exhibits; 2) specific elements to be measured; 3) the best methods of collecting data; and 4) the barriers to access from the perspective of practitioners and academics.[64]

A need for basic information about users was recognized and there was general agreement among meeting participants that standardization of user registration data would be a good place to begin. A researcher or patron profile, one that would assign a category of user from a standard list and include demographics and institutional affiliation, would be useful. Other useful questions tallied at the meeting include the following: What materials were being used? What was the path by which users arrived at the archives? What was the purpose of the visit or the proposed outcome of the research? How useful were descriptive tools? How effective were the instructional tools/materials, in the room and/or online? How satisfied were users with the services offered? What services were useful? Generally, what was the impact or outcome of the visit? What information-seeking patterns do users display? Are there differences in the patterns and requests of remote users versus those who visit in person? How do users come to trust or view as authentic archival holdings? At one point the discussion also centered on the challenge and desire to know who, among potential users, were not being reached, not using the archival resources offered, and how outreach, in these instances, might be more effective. In his presentation, Paul Conway gave broad definition to the question of "what" to measure by suggesting that metrics could be designed to assess five categories: quality of access, integrity of assets, value of archives, user collaboration, and managing archival functions.[65]

The primary reason for collecting this data is self-assessment regarding collections and services, that is, to provide information that could assist in improving and/or redirecting efforts. At a local level, choices in processing priorities and appraisal might be affected, user education made more efficient, and guidance in terms of resource allocation could be provided. Furthermore, standardization of these measures would allow and encourage a comparison of data that could offer a broader view of archival use and lead to the establishment of benchmarks among comparable institutions. With the eventual goal of establishing a program that would collect data regularly and over time, the assessment of changes in archival use and, broadly speaking, in the profession would also become more accurate.

Some doubts about standardization were voiced at the meeting. Could researchers use these metrics consistently? Would the content collected be made consistent? Other obstacles that would need to be addressed included: limited time and resources and the increase of competing demands placed on archivists, hesitation to "bother" users with requests for information, privacy concerns, anonymity of online sessions, murkiness in identifying the value of discrete archival functions, and a reluctance on the part of institutions to publish findings based on collected data. The opinion, on the part of some archivists, that they know best what users need, was also mentioned as a barrier that would need to be overcome. There was also the sense that simply to collect more data would be counterproductive. The goal would have to be to collect better, more useful, "smarter" data for it to have any impact. There would also have to be an institutional infrastructure in place to support data collection to ensure the long-term viability of the project.

In addressing the question of method, of how the data envisioned in the project would be collected, there was agreement among the participants that no single best method would accomplish the task. Rather, there were more appropriate methods applicable to specific questions. These may, for example, involve content analysis of transaction logs or quantitative analysis of survey results. The suggestion was made that qualitative data, along with the quantitative, would have a positive impact. Speaking at the end of the meeting, Wendy Duff described a process of building modules that would incorporate various components of a given question. Her example was a module designed to evaluate physical reference, using the measures of impact and satisfaction, and which could be conducted as an exit survey interview.[66] Other modules would be constructed for other specific purposes. Lastly, although any survey or questionnaire would have to include certain common, core elements so that data could be meaningfully combined as well as compared, among the most important findings to come from the meeting was that measures of impact and outcomes must be tailored to the particular goals of the individual institution.

Developing Archival Metrics, Phases 2 and 3

The meeting in June 2004 was envisioned as the first phase in a three-phase project that would result in the development and testing of the tools of measurement, delivery of user manuals, and preparation for implementation of the program. Phase One identified the priorities for measurement and the tools and techniques to be used. Phase Two calls for the creation, testing, and validating of standardized assessment tools—questionnaires, forms, etc.—and the establishment of best practices. Phase Three is the lead up to implementation. The challenge facing special collections is to move towards an ongoing system of measurement that would allow for regular evaluation of services, produce an ability to track users and their needs, provide specific information that would encourage continuous progress and improvement, and enable comparisons among peer repositories. The Archival Metrics project has assumed that goal as its own. Beyond the 2004 meeting, the project held focus groups and semi-structured interviews with archivists, researchers, and students; assessed existing assessment tools; and examined standardized definitions of quality archival services to create a landscape of concepts to be tested. These concepts and definitions would contribute to a list of key descriptive measures that would inform the surveys and other assessment tools prior to a program of initial testing. That pilot testing program began in 2006. Another aspect of the project's work has to do with web analytics, measurements that are, today, widely available, but useful only in a limited way. A guide is being prepared to assist archivists in understanding how transaction logs interact with archival access tools and to help them discuss their requirements for these logs with the people from Information Technology (IT) with whom they will most likely be conferring. Work on a usable and useful registration card is continuing as is a business plan that will ensure sustainability of the project. Maintaining collected data over the long term is another goal, and creation of a model for a data repository is among the group's objectives. Lastly, the interesting, if less concrete, question of impact assessment, which seeks to answer the question, "What difference do archives make in the lives of researchers and society?" is providing another focal point for the project. Taken together, the goals of the project seeks to address the challenge facing special collections by "foster[ing] a culture of assessment by making archival evaluation more streamlined, easier, and cheaper for archival repositories and to suggest means of measuring the impact of archives."[67]

Conclusion: Measurement and Assessment

In their 2003 report on the ARL Special Collections Initiative, Joe Hewitt and Judith Panitch conclude by reminding readers of the strengths and limitations of ARL. Advocacy and the ability to bring issues to the attention of others is one of the organization's strengths. It has the ability to bring people together to discuss and develop projects that seek solutions, and, thereby, help to initiate those projects. As they say, however, "The association is not interested in taking on the management and operation of new projects or programs on a permanent basis, but is may be in the position to provide space and seed funding to create projects that will result in programs that other organizations, such as individual member libraries or a consortia of libraries will continue into the future."[68] In its 2006 final report, the ARL Task Force on Special Collections referred to its decision not to establish an ongoing survey effort, while stating its recognition of the "need for improved measures of the depth and quality of unique and rare collections." The group also noted the appointment in 2005 of an ARL Task Force on New Ways of Measuring Collections, and encouraged any future ARL group focusing on special collections to collaborate with this new task force to "identify key measures and benchmarks to describe, evaluate, and assess special collections."[69] In February 2007, the new ARL Working Group on Special Collections listed among its general issues its intention to continue working in this way. An examination of publicly available documents from the Task Force on

New Ways of Measuring Collections through October 2007 did not indicate an effort directed specifically at special collections.

4. Remaining Challenges

"Coordinate planning for collecting 19th- and 20th-century materials and those in new formats." This item in the agenda for the ARL Task Force on Special Collections remained deferred, but the profession still faces the problem. In its final report, the Task Force stated its belief that "regardless of format, an enormous amount of valuable material remains uncollected and risks being permanently lost" and recommends that "coordinated strategies for identifying and collecting these materials are greatly needed."[70] It also stated, however, that the topic is huge and poorly defined and that a lot of preliminary conceptual work would be required before moving ahead with any plan to coordinate the needed efforts. In a related point, the Task Force also recommended that criteria and strategies for collecting "born-digital and other new media materials" be developed.[71] These two recommendations became the issues with the highest priority for the new ARL Working Group on Special Collections in 2007.

The final item to be considered from the Task Force's agenda was also the first item, its most basic, and the element of its change around which the others were framed: to promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library. As their Final Report comments, a statement titled "Research Libraries and the Commitment to Special Collections" was sent from the Task Force to the ARL Board of Directors in December 2002. That statement briefly outlines the mission and value of special collections and recommends supportive action that member libraries should take and maintain with regard to their special collections. These actions range from providing reliable funding and secure, environmentally appropriate space to inclusion in overall strategic library planning, support for exploring the "issues, implications and promise inherent in acquiring primary materials that are 'born digital'"[72] and beyond. The statement was endorsed by the Board in February the following year. While this statement is a tangible demonstration of the Task Force's imperative to promote special collections, so to were all of its efforts to assist these institutions with the challenges that lie ahead.

We should also note that the challenges facing special collections are by no means exhausted by the issues addressed by the ARL Task Force. There are matters of technology and metadata standards, for example. Digitization of materials involves both of those issues in addition to others. On what basis do we choose materials to digitize? What is the proper relationship between preservation and access to materials. What is the best role for digital exhibits on an academic repository's website? How do small repositories compete in the digital world? How should we regard the relationship between original document and digital surrogate? Should finding aids be converted to EAD? How does one build a successful institutional repository? As libraries change, how do special collections, as institutions functioning within a library structure also change? Answers to some questions may very well be informed by a successful program of measurement and assessment. What can be considered best practices with regard to remote users and outreach, generally? Or, as William Crowe, suggested, they may, just as profitably, provide us with better questions. In any case, these are just a few of the issues that face special collections in a era of significant change. The ARL has addressed what it considers to be the most important and the most pressing of those issues. As for others, there is no shortage.

III. Methodology

Since its 1998 survey of member institutions, the Association of Research Libraries has been working to identify, investigate, and recommend solutions to the major challenges facing special collections today. Are these the issues that occupy the attention of special collection librarians and the library staff and administrators with whom they work? More specifically, this paper seeks to know if the concerns, as examined by the ARL, are shared by smaller university-based special collections that are not located at research libraries. How do they understand the challenges they face? How do they set and address priorities among those challenges?

To begin to answer these questions, this project conducted a case study of Special Collections at the University of North Carolina, Asheville. It is an active, growing, and ambitious program at a small state university devoted to undergraduate education. Six members of the Ramsey Library staff were invited to participate in the study by sitting for interviews. They are: Jim Kuhlman, University Librarian and CIO; Helen Wykle, Special Collections Coordinator and Public Services Librarian; Bryan Sinclair, Associate University Librarian for Public Services; Brandy Bourne, Web Services Librarian; Barbara Svenson, Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian; Jamie Patterson, Special Collections Assistant. These individuals were chosen on the basis of their relationship to Special Collections and their positions of leadership within the Library. Interviews were conducted in person and at the Ramsey Library over two days in September 2007. The interview script, recruitment letter, and consent form are included as appendices A–C to this paper.

IV. Case Study: Special Collections at the University of North Carolina, Asheville

1. The Site in Brief

The University of North Carolina at Asheville is the designated liberal arts university in the UNC system. Currently, about 3,350 undergraduates are enrolled. Special Collections is located on the second floor of the D. Hiden Ramsey Library on the Asheville campus and is a department within that library. Approximately 10,000 books and 700 linear feet of archival material, including manuscripts; audio recordings; some 20,000 photographs (prints, cellulose negatives, glass plate negatives, etc.); and a small volume of relevant realia, memorabilia, and ephemera are housed in the Collection. University Archives are also part of the Collections.

Special Collections began at UNCA when the collections of the Southern Highlands Research Center were given to Ramsey Library in 1986. The research center, located in the Library but independent of it, had been operating since 1977 with a mission to "preserve, collect, and arrange primary materials of the Southern Highlands."[73] Its initial efforts were directed towards collecting materials related to urban Appalachia, a neglected aspect of the region, and to Asheville itself. That focus has been expanded at the current collection "to meet the needs of the undergraduate research programs at UNCA" and to include "materials that center on issues of race and ethnicity, education, WWI and WWII, arts and craft, and other local, regional, national, and international materials of interest to the undergraduate researcher, the scholar, and the general user."[74] The Collection's Mission Statement refers to collecting several categories of information, including, "manuscripts, photographs, and audio tapes documenting local history and culture.[75]

The staff at Special Collections currently includes two staff members. They are Special Collections Coordinator and Public Services Librarian Helen Wykle and the Special Collections Assistant, Jamie Patterson. The coordinator's position is a 10-month position, while the Assistant works three-quarter time year round. A variable—and often large—number of students, interns, and volunteers also work at the Collection. (As of this writing, the number is 18.) Special Collections is open to all patrons Monday through Thursday from 9:00AM to 2:30PM and by appointment.

2. Interview Results

Interviews were conducted with six members of the UNCA Library staff. Each was asked questions from among the list provided at the end of this study. (See Appendix A.) Given that each of the participants holds a different position at the library, some of the questions were pertinent for one interview while others were not. In each case the interviewees were asked to describe the nature of their connection, contact, and/or interaction with Special Collections. In most cases, a broad question regarding the nature of the challenges facing special collections, as seen from their perspective, followed.

Bryan Sinclair, Associate University Librarian for Public Services

As public service librarian, Bryan Sinclair has oversight responsibilities for those aspects of the library that interact with the public, with anything that has to do with the library's public face. A major aspect of his job is to provide consultation, assistance, and support to those units that he represents within the library, including Special Collections. In response to a problem Special Collections faced with regard to inadequate physical space, he was involved in the process that, within the last year, resulted in an expansion of that space, the introduction of industrial shelving, and the creation of the Collection's digitization annex. Aside from the considerations of whether and when resources might be available to support this expansion and upgrade, Sinclair reports that his main concern in considering the project was to ask, "How does this relate to the undergraduate learning experience." Will this project improve that experience? This perspective was shared, emphasized, and repeated by everyone I spoke with at UNCA as the driving force behind the major decisions they make. In a world where, of course, considerations of resources cannot be put aside, it was informative to know the extent to which this measure informs the way challenges are addressed, including those at Special Collections.

Sinclair described Special Collections as having a lot of autonomy within the library and a coordinator whose interest, knowledge, and energy was very much responsible for the success of the program. In responding to what I called the ambitiousness of the program, Sinclair spoke about a need to revise the Collection's mission statement and collection development policy. He spoke of the double-edged blessing that can also be a curse wherein success and a higher profile can lead to offers of more and more materials and of his preference to consider narrowing the focus of the collection back to that of urban appalachia, particularly the immediate Asheville and Buncombe County area. As he said, not only does a successful web presence bring in more potential material, but it adds to the desire to acquire "this great stuff" knowing that you can put it up on the web and share it with the world in a way that wasn't possible not that long ago. "It's not [just that] . . . we can take this and put it in a room somewhere."[76]

The flip side of this consideration of the growth of the collection, however, came up when our conversation turned to use and users of the collection. This, again, also gets back to the focus on undergraduate education. Yes, they see website statistics in the form of Google Analytics, though Sinclair has some questions as to their overall usefulness. Yes, people using Special Collections register and some basic statistics are kept. But when the connection between users and collections is made, the worry about the breadth of the collection disappears.

> One thing that prevents me from being too concerned about it is that Helen [Helen Wykle, Special Collections Coordinator] has a very good sense of the student—why we're here—so long as undergraduate students are using the collections, as long as we're hiring students to work on projects up there . . . as long as we've got students involved, that's my main concern. Our number one mission is to support the curriculum of the university. . . . I don't fret that we're taking too many collections as long as she can tell me exactly who is using this on campus and for what.[77]

The fact is that when it comes to the population about which they care the most, Bryan Sinclair is confident in knowing who they are and either how they are doing or in his ability to find that out. UNCA is a small place, he says.

> I know a lot of faculty here. I know what they require their students to do. . . . I know what people are working on. I know numbers of student workers. . . . I see the projects, the results from their work. . . . I see the end product, so I don't feel the need to have quantitative data because I have all this qualitative data.[78]

Use is expanding into different areas of the university beyond the traditional humanities and social sciences. The Collection is also used by members of the Asheville and larger regional communities, and Sinclair is "absolutely pleased" that this is the case for a number of very good reasons, including the fact that it ends up helping students and faculty in terms of good relations and potential donors. But, as with his example of the library being a (small selection) government documents repository, which also generates public community use, "that is not why we do it, but because we believe it supports our students and faculty."

I asked Sinclair his opinion regarding the absence of Special Collections record—with the exception of its monographs—in the UNCA library's OPAC. About this, he is unconcerned, and you can spell his lack of concern G-O-O-G-L-E. There are two issues at play here. First, for Sinclair, not having these records in the OPAC is not preventing people from accessing them. In fact, putting a collection-level preliminary record in the OPAC would not help because this is not the way people access these collections. The locally-maintained OPAC is "a dying breed, a dinosaur," he says.

> Metadata and all that I think we need to do for ourselves because we need to maintain some sort of order for the future, this really doesn't factor into the lives of most of our searchers.

Of course, having subject headings for archival collections in the OPAC would allow collocation of like materials, but "that's not the avenue that's taken." This doesn't mean that Sinclair doesn't recognize the "right reasons" for doing this. Of course, he does, but as he says:

> I know in my heart it is the right thing to do . . . here's the thing, if I've got hours to digitize more collections and make them available over the internet or I have to take staff and put them on catalog work for things I already have, where am I going to put my resources.[79]

This is the second issue. The ever-present choice of where to put scant resources. In Helen Wykle, UNCA Special Collections has, in Bryan Sinclair's words, someone "who almost has research library aspirations," but also a very small budget. When I asked his opinion about the possibility of implementing EAD, he said that "in an ideal world we would hire more staff." But none of us live anywhere close to that world, and that might describe the biggest challenge of all.

Brandy Bourne, Web Services and Reference Librarian

Brandy Bourne is part of the Reference staff, is in charge of the library website, and for the last year and a half has had responsibility for the university website. Her contact with Special Collections occurs in several ways. Though not often directly involved with the Special Collections website, she does occasionally work on projects with them. She sometimes promotes the Collection on the main library page, often through slide shows that feature an event, collection, special theme, etc. In her work to create promotional materials for the university, she interacts with the collection directly as a user, in search of appropriate materials for those projects. While working at the reference desk, she fields questions from users who may best be directed to Special Collections. Also, as a member of the library staff, she is involved in meetings where issues concerning Special Collections are discussed.

The practical challenge that Bourne faces when working with Special Collections is the large number of "hands" involved in projects and the lack of time, energy, and resources, given the large number of student workers, to do the kind of oversight required. She referred to the "little army of students" in Special Collections, and that though they often bring a decent skill set, they have their "own agenda . . . that doesn't always fit in with our standards, or it certainly doesn't lend itself to uniformity and manageability." It is something that they would like to get a handle on. Bourne sees it as a staffing problem.

> We could use more staffing to train our student workers, they would certainly benefit from that, and to develop a more concrete plan for their tasks.[80]

The growth of Special Collections is an issue that gets discussed frequently at meetings, says Bourne. As she says:

> We are a small university in a small town that happens to be very culturally rich. We've been fortunate to get some incredible collections up there and these collections require a lot of care and we are known for these collections, which brings offers of more and that is certainly an issue. . . . We have a geographic scope, certainly. The idea of where those geographic boundaries lie is our main issue.[81]

On other matters, Bourne reported that it can be difficult for patrons to access Special Collections materials and that it can be a challenge to let people know about the great material that is available there. There is the issue of the collection having limited hours. Many people don't know what "Special Collections" means, why their material isn't in the catalog, or why someone at the reference desk can't tell them exactly what's there. When responding to a question about the relationship between Special Collections and the Library at a time when libraries are changing so much, she said:

> I think the issue of us being an undergraduate institution, fitting Special Collections into that—we aren't a research library—is always a strain, where funding priorities are involved especially. . . .Special Collections needs a lot of resources and we want to support undergraduate education which involves other things, instruction, we have great plans for computing facilities, for an information commons, and Special Collections is off in another direction and, I think, most of us see it as more outwardly focused, or at least it tends to be used more for outreach, and that includes outreach to the campus, to represent the story of the university, the story of the community. . . .[82]

Barbara Svenson, Acquisitions and Cataloging Librarian

Barbara Svenson is one of three people who make up the Cataloging and Acquisitions staff at the UNCA library. Of those three, she is the only one who does original cataloging. She provides support for Special Collections by cataloging their monographs and ephemera, also by assisting with the purchase of any new monographs. Given this narrow scope, our conversation centered on issues of catalog records and the breadth of the materials being collected.

Svenson agrees that manuscript collections should be represented in the OPAC. These need to be full catalog records, available on OCLC, to meet the guidelines of the Western North Carolina Library Network catalog they share with Appalachian State University and Western Carolina University. There have been conversations between cataloging and Special Collections on this matter involving a process whereby the Collection's digitized records would be "harvested," and the data would be translated into MARC records and entered into OCLC. Svenson says that this is not currently being discussed, though this does not mean that the matter will not come up again. When discussions were ongoing and an effort was made to set up the process, it was "a matter of staffing," says Svenson, "and getting the software, the IT aspect worked out, and a matter of Special Collections having a broad gamut of things going on, a lot of things going on"[83] that put the effort on hold. If the data and workflow issues could be worked out, Svenson would be involved in reviewing the records, presumably generated from Dublin Core metadata, which would, itself, not be an easy process.

As for the collecting scope of Special Collections, Svenson believes it is too broad, both for the staff and for the physical facility. It is also, in her opinion, needlessly redundant with collections at ASU and Western. She worked, while an undergraduate, at the Southern Highlands Research Center, the precursor to UNCA's Special Collections, and believes that a more limited focus, along the lines of the SHRC policy, would be more appropriate.

Helen Wykle, Special Collections Coordinator and Public Services Librarian

When asked about the challenges facing Special Collections, Helen Wykle clearly identified the matter of balancing growth against static resources as her biggest challenge. She also described the context of this challenge as one in which there is a lack of understanding regarding the implications of that challenge, a context in which neither Special Collections nor the growth occurring in this area are well understood. Although Special Collections at UNCA is "somewhat outside the basic functions of the library, as many Special Collections are," one of Wykle's goals for the Collection is to have it become "integrally understood and included within the basic operations of the library."[84] Our interview about the challenges facing the Collection was then initially framed by a discussion of its role in a changing educational and informational environment.

First, speaking broadly, Wykle describes the contemporary situation in which "as a source of information, the physical library has very little significance to scholars and their process of scholarly communication."[85] The library continues to play a critical role in connecting both the student and scholar with information, but the landscape has changed because of electronic resources, in such a way that the library becomes an extension of the university and the external community.

> I think that everyone is realizing that the focus is really on external community and the role of the library, the role of the institution in getting itself connected with community. Higher education is moving out into the community and it's never really done that effectively, except for some institutions. . . . Service learning, field work, information resources beyond the walls of the institution . . . the focus is really towards the external not to the internal. Not what can the institution do for me, but what can those things outside the institution bring to the institution to help make a better marriage between the learning experience of the student, the scholarly communication. Everything that drives that has some basis now, I think, in electronic resource.
>
> My view is that Special Collections, if they were behaving responsibly, were already in tune with this because they were always to some extent externally focused, unless they simply were locking the doors and being a repository. And I've never seen us as a repository. I've always seen us as an important part of the educational process within the institution.[86]

The impact of this view on Special Collections, an institution that obtains most of its collections from that external (non-university) community, is that they go out and seek collections, go out and do oral histories that extend the materials they have in-house. As Wykle says, the dialogue with students and faculty is, " how can we help you to set up programs that may use the materials that we have here, but make the connection to what's going on outside in the fieldwork?" One example she offered is the work done after the YWCA collection arrived, with students going out to the Y, talking with the women who worked there, gathering oral histories, collecting additional documents, doing a lot of interdisciplinary work that involves, for example, race, gender, economics, and sociology.

At that point, I asked if this wasn't a move away from an archival mission, to which Wykle, replied, "But then I think, what is the archival mission. . . . I really question that."[87] Further, she speculated that the reason many special collections may have been marginalized is because they've always seen themselves outside the mission of the university, again, as repositories where things are preserved. Being a "preservation repository" is part of what Special Collections at UNCA does, Wykle says, but it is not the primary focus. Rather, she sees the Collection as having an integral role in undergraduate education and being attached to that mission of the institution. She understands that other Special Collections archivists may not share that view. As I tried to steer our conversation back to my list of questions, I mentioned that those questions had very little to do with the preceding discussion. "Your questions are based on standard models of archival practice," she said, as if to recognize the juxtaposition of the two. She concluded the thought by saying:

> It's not that I'm such a maverick that I want to be outside the profession, but, I guess, I want to hurry the profession along. I also want to make sure that the profession doesn't get in the way of what I feel is a necessary role within this specific institution.[88]

Another part of the context in which Special Collections operates became apparent when I asked Wykle what she thinks about Collection records not being in the OPAC. "I think about it a lot. Send me some staff." In fact, she agreed that many of my questions could end in that statement. As a result, she puts together a combination of internships, volunteers, student temporary workers, external non-student wage positions, and a lot of grants. As a result, quality control is a big problem, as are continuity and sustainability. The Collection had some early success working with ContentDM, but progress has been slow and intermittent at best since then. It experimented with Archivist's Toolkit, but shelved that process, at least for now. Wykle's hope was to be able to get their records into MARC format for the OPAC with only minimal impact on the "staff." Results were not satisfactory. Wykle agrees those records should be in the catalog "for long term and comprehensive access to the collections," but for now the only way the public will have access is through

Google, "which is a blessing to us."[89] She notes not only that people going to Google before they go to the catalog, but also that the staffing problem in the cataloging unit is as acute as it is in Special Collections. Would she like to have the Collection's records in the OPAC? Yes.

Are hidden collections a problem? They are not, at least not in terms of collections being unprocessed. The collection is certainly young, not large, and Wykle moved toward establishing a digital presence shortly after arriving in 1997. Over 90% of the collection finding aids are online at the collection-level or better. Approximately 50% have finding aids at the folder-level, with about 25% at item-level. With regard to measurement and assessment of use and users, Wykle indicated that no user survey had been done in the past, at least, "not in any controlled way."[90] She can look at library web traffic via Google Analytics, but reports that she has "no systematic way to see Special Collections data in usable form."**91** She would, however, like to see data on referrals to Special Collections from the library's general reference desk, but that information is not being collected in any consistent fashion.

Wykle said that she agreed with a characterization of a choice that has to be made in her world of limited resources, as being between the goals of undergraduate education and an ability to increase the research value of the collections she oversees. She says she struggles daily with the question:

> How far afield can we go with regard to quality control in the interests of serving the educational need of the student in a Special Collections environment without destroying collections or without destroying research value? And how thin can we be stretched with regard to our staffing resources to do that?[92]

Sometimes the response to that choice might cause both sides to lose. Special Collections receives a substantial number of requests for information, in-depth reference, and, especially, requests for images to be supplied for publication. Recently, in view of an increasing number of requests and an increasingly stretched staff, a retrenchment in services has been considered. To either stop providing these services or to make the cost in time or funds excessive to the requester would not only damage the reputation of the Collection, but would also cut down on valuable student experience, since students respond to many of these requests. It would also deprive the library of a revenue stream, though, given the library's primary mission to support undergraduate education, it may be one they are willing to give up. As we were concluding the interview I asked Wykle if, given the conversation we just had, would it be fair to say that the challenges she faces at Special Collections primarily revolve around the allocation of resources. She replied, "Yes it does. I have to say it does. I really think it does. . . ."[93]

Jim Kuhlman, University Librarian and CIO

In his role as University Librarian, all matters pertaining to the UNCA library are within Jim Kulhman's purview. As the University's Chief Information Officer, he leads the planning effort concerned with the architecture, flow, and management of information on campus. Though specific matters of archival practice are certainly not necessarily his immediate concern—these are in the capable hands of Helen Wykle—the broader issues and challenges facing Special Collections are among his concerns, especially as they may be seen and understood in the context of the Library's mission and that of the University.

Special Collections is a relatively expensive program, given its physical aspect and labor-intensiveness, says Kuhlman. It has been ambitious, especially given Helen Wykle's early and aggressive program of digitization, and it faces limited resources. Another aspect of the program's ambition can be seen in a broadening of its collection development policy that began with Wykle's arrival. Though this may be attributable in part to her interests and energies, for Kuhlman, this also has to do with a change in an understanding of the mission of the Collection, in such a way that the criteria for inclusion becomes its ability to support the curriculum in terms of "giving experience and learning opportunities to students . . . contact with primary source material, going along with the ideals of undergraduate research projects."[94] Kulhman doubts whether a narrow focus on urban appalachia would do that.

The limit on available resources is real and is unlikely to change any time soon. Kuhlman described a hypothetical case in which he would have to argue in front of the University chancellor that it was "of more value to the University to create a metadata cataloger for the library than to have two more police officers."

> And that gets to be an especially tough argument because in house, on campus, Helen and others may think that there is very little understanding of Special Collections in the library. If we get to the outside, there is even less, except in isolated pockets of certain faculty members who use it heavily, where there's great support.[95]

Compared to other departments on campus, the library, including Special Collections does very well, says Kuhlman. It is not as if folks are saying that what is done in the Collection is not good or valuable or without justification. A realistic showing of increased use would not change the allocation and distribution of resources. But compared to other needs, "I don't see a whole lot of wiggle room." says Kuhlman. The biggest challenge for Special Collections, then, he says, is to ask what can be done in this climate.

Kuhlman sees the response to that question in the change in the Collection's mission from being a collection about urban appalachia, that is, content-focused, to one that is more student-focused, in keeping with the larger university mission's commitment to undergraduate education and undergraduate research.

> I'm thinking about Special Collections in our environment as being a teaching learning tool as opposed to a collection of things. [96]

The truest value of the Collection is putting kids in front of materials and having them be engaged. If outside scholars get to use the materials, that's great, but, in the end, “tangential,” says Kuhlman. If resources were needed to increase availability of materials to students, for coursework, projects, etc., that would be an argument he could at least take to the university . . . and has. The digitization program at Special Collections is described as being in service to student teaching and learning rather than to research value extending beyond campus.

When, in the interview, I asked if this choice between what we were calling educational value and research value also came with costs—more collections, better processing, quality control, for example—and did anyone need to hear what was being lost, the reply was again clear:

> I would argue we’re not that kind of institution . . . that’s not our job. . . . I don’t see our library as building this resource from the past for the future. Whether in Special Collections or whether we’re talking about our other collections, I think that we’re building a teaching learning laboratory.
>
> I see its primary role as fitting into this campus architecture of the undergraduate with an emphasis on undergraduate research. . . . Are we going to try to serve publishers and people trying to get images from the outside world or [are we] going to put more emphasis on working with our students and let the other parts lie? I think we work with our students and let the other parts lie.[97]

Kuhlman admits the cost. The lack of quality control means an inconsistent product. Insufficient time and resources may result in a teaching process that is curtailed. Undergraduate education is not necessarily about content, first and foremost.

> I am satisfied that in all cases we are erring on the side of letting people do things and then not necessarily coming back and either doing the teaching or the ensuring in terms of quality and things like that. Ideally, we would have the staff resources to ensure that we would do that Hopefully, someday we will have. In the meantime, or in absence of that, I think that if I had to choose, I would choose to let the work and the experimentation go ahead and take the lumps of somebody else telling us we weren’t doing as good a job as we should.[98]

To support his view of the role of Special Collections at UNCA, Kuhlman cites an unrelenting commitment to undergraduate education and research; equally unrelenting budget constraints; an understanding that UNCA Special Collections will never compete with research library collections in terms of research value; and a belief that when left to the task, students may leave you with junk, but with genius as well. To end our conversation, he said, "It's not that we're going to prepare people to come out with the skills and quality and knowledge that you will [have] from SILS, but that we might interest somebody in going to SILS."[99] And, they do.

Jamie Patterson, Special Collections Assistant

As Special Collections Assistant, Jamie Patterson is primarily concerned with the administrative details of the Collection. She is involved with the processing of oral history collections, but not any of the other materials present in the Collection. She is also not involved in providing direction to any of the Collection's student workers. Aside from the Coordinator, Helen Wykle, she is the only other permanent employee and works on a three-quarter time basis. The most time consuming single part of her job currently is keeping up with requests for image reproductions. These requests can be for single images or have been for as many as 50 to 60 images at once.

When hired, Patterson was told that the primary focus and goal of the Collection was the creation of a teaching environment for undergraduates. Given the demands on the Helen Wykle's time, the biggest challenge she sees at Special Collections is that there really isn't the ability to teach students much or very often, or to help them out. When new technologies are introduced, as was ContentDM a few years ago thanks to a successful grant proposal, it is rarely able to be used as it could be if there were proper time for consistent training, and the ability to incorporate it into daily practice and workflow. This project, initially a collaborative project with UNCA, Pack Library and the Asheville Art Museum, is now relatively dormant. With the fast pace of changing priorities, about a year passed at one point between

Patterson's own successive efforts to work with oral history records in ContentDM. She also described situations where students had been unsuccessful preparing collections for lack of training and/or supervision.

About two-thirds of the Collection's users, those that come into the facility, are from the non-university community. It is the students she sees that are often surprised to learn about the Collection's website and the wealth of information available there. (External users presumably know about the Collection because of the website.) Patterson takes tallies from the sign-in sheet and keeps track of reference questions. No other use/user measurements have been done in the time she has worked at the Collection. Anecdotally, more departments on campus are becoming involved with Special Collections. Generally speaking, they are surprised at the amount of work that goes on.

V. Analysis and Conclusions

Special Collections at the University of North Carolina at Asheville is not part of an ARL library. The stated primary mission of the library of which it is a part "is to support the teaching, research, and public service missions of the University of North Carolina at Asheville."[100] UNCA is a designated undergraduate liberal arts university undergoing a strategic planning process that, according to Jim Kuhlman, will renew and reemphasize the institution's commitment to undergraduate education and undergraduate research. But the ARL does set a standard. The work of its Task Force on Special Collections sought to identify problems and indicate the way towards solutions in order to improve a set of standards. The Coordinator at UNCA Special Collections is, of course, quite aware of those professional standards. They are the measures and models against which she compares her work. But are the specific concerns raised by the ARL Task Force relevant to the situation at UNCA?

In my conversations with members of the UNCA library staff, no one mentioned hidden collections as a significant problem. The Collection is young and small, though growing. Their rate of representing finding aids online is very good. There are a few exceptions, and additions made to collections sometimes lag behind. The only significant backlog among monographs has been there for approximately 15 years, arrived under special circumstances, and is regarded by some has having questionable relevance to the Collection. Regarding the inclusion of manuscript records in the Library's OPAC, these are not currently included, and there is some variation of opinion on the question. Bryan Sinclair, while certainly not being opposed to their inclusion, finds their absence not particularly significant. An effort to accomplish the task would not be the best use of available resources in his opinion.

Helen Wykle and Barb Svenson believe these records should be included, as does, according to Wykle, Robert Bland, the head of Technical Services. Although the quick and the blunt reason for the impasse is "staffing," previous attempts to convert and upload records do point toward other aspects of the challenge involved. Software and IT problems were cited by Svenson. Wykle referred to an automated process that stripped out all but one or two subject area headings per record, rendering them nearly useless. She also mentioned the "negotiation" it took just to get a couple of records added. That there is no such limitation on subject headings in MARC ought to make the first difficulty solvable by some means. That we are discussing a process involving tiny staffs stretched to their limits may make the second difficulty more enduring. My own sense is that somewhere between the "tweaking" that Wykle says these records may need and the "editing choices" that Svenson spoke of is also a lack of consistency in the Dublin Core records that were in many cases made by students, and, therefore, a process that may not be easy.

The impact of Greene and Meissner has not been particularly strong at UNCA Special Collections. Devised to address the "reality of large modern collections," the practice of 'processing light' hasn't been altogether applicable. Most of the collections are not that large, though flexible collection-specific processing solutions are commonly applied. The ambitious digitization program of the Collection, however, has lead to online finding aides that often feature item-level description and accompanying images, which accounts for the Collection's rich web presence. Although the arrival in late summer 2007 of a very large collection (100+ boxes) of material relating to the Asheville's Urban Renewal programs of the 1960s and 1970s may provide an opportunity to apply some of Greene and Meissner's procedures, it is currently standard to remove metal fasteners, seek and remove duplicate material, and refolder materials using acid-free folders.

Measurement and assessment is another issue that is only peripherally on the UNCA Special Collections agenda, but one where the work of the ARL could be helpful. Although there is some doubt in various quarters around the library as to the necessity or usefulness of quantitative data on use and users, Helen Wykle, in a response to an earlier project on this subject, said that no controlled user studies in house or online have been done and that "the need grows annually."[101] In addition to statistics on basic referrals from the library's reference desk, the kind of information she would find most beneficial include: better numbers on the split between internal and external users; information regarding external users from other local colleges; more reliable confirmation (or not) that most users first find Special Collections via the web; information on the level of the user, commercial, K–12, or higher education; more detailed data on collection use. Helen Tibbo's working group on web analytics may produce something very useful for this Collection.[102] A standardized registration card and the ability to compare "like" statistics might lend incentive to the use of the data. Even in an environment where user data will likely not effect allocation of resources, the opportunity for self-study, self-benchmarking would be useful in shaping the contours of the program. The sense expressed at the July 2004 meeting on Developing Standardized Metrics that, "if there was a toolset that assisted with collecting a basic suite of use and user-based data it would be both well-received and widely used,"[103] would be shared by Helen Wykle. However, it must be noted that the need for this information or an appreciation of its usefulness is not widely shared at the library.

With its focus on undergraduate research and education, UNCA Special Collections does create training opportunities for those who might join the next generation of special collections librarians. It is, perhaps, a rare opportunity to be offered at a university of this size, particularly a public university. And the bringing together of undergraduates and special collections is not outside the ARL sphere of interest. At the Brown symposium in 2001, the meeting that gave rise to the Task Force on Special Collections, several speakers spoke to the kind of effort in which UNCA is involved. William J. Crowe mentioned the need to find better ways to expose special collections librarians to enterprising undergraduates.[104] David H. Stam said, "Diminish the barriers to student handling. . . . The transforming potential for the student of touching the rare and unusual could be worth the price. . . . That is the answer to the question, what's so special. . . . It is the palpable connection to history that comes from the tactile experience. . . . It's a conversion experience."[105] Robert L. Byrd talked at some length about the importance of special collections encouraging use by students, including, if not particularly, undergraduates. Referring to undergraduate work, he said, "No this is not scholarship; but it is learning—a powerful form of learning—and special collections exist to support teaching and learning as well as original scholarship."[106] (It is worth noting that the goal at UNCA Special Collections is to promote teaching and learning, but to achieve undergraduate scholarship as well.) Other topics mentioned by these speakers very much call to mind the efforts of Special Collections at UNCA: the desire to find ways to expose special collections practitioners to more intense building of community, including learning about the work in communities seen as far afield (Crowe); the clear responsibility of individual institutions to collect and preserve local and regional sources (Stam); the critical need for collecting to be linked to the sense of identity, goals, ambitions, and academic programs of the university (Byrd).

More specifically, Special Collections at UNCA offers one answer to a question raised by Steven Escar Smith in June 2005 at the conference, *Bridging the Gap: Education and Special Collections*. He asked his listeners to imagine a special collections library organized not around collections, but around teaching and learning. Smith says, "Placing more emphasis on teaching and learning does not neglect our duty to preservation, and hence, research, but, rather, supports and reinforces that duty."[107]

At UNCA, the emphasis is placed on teaching and learning. Special Collections does become a classroom. Students do get the opportunity to experience the ignition of interest, to have the "conversion experience." Collaboration and communication between Special Collections and various departments on campus is a primary activity. Smith says he likes to think of a curator as "an advanced subject specialist with a strong service ethic, perhaps a little like a county extension agent."[108] This is not a bad description of the job done by Helen Wykle. But where Smith wants to raise the value of teaching and learning to, at least, approach that which is commonly attached to research, and to, thus, increase the relation of mutual support between the two, the balance is not so equitable at UNCA and is, therefore, I think, in ways uneasy.

Undergraduate education is the mission of this university. The institution's size allows it to offer this in ways that many larger universities cannot. Its emphasis on undergraduate research as a goal to be taken seriously, perhaps, sets it further apart. Special Collections is active, ambitious, respected, and it offers an experience that many undergraduates do not get. Helen Wykle speaks with pride about the number of students who have passed through her shop and gone on to library school. Jim Kuhlman says that instilling that kind of interest in a student is a most worthy goal. It is something that Special Collections can do.

I asked about the costs involved in having Special Collections focused on student education and experience so much so that if set in opposition to the prospect of adding research value to the collections, the latter was regarded as less critical to the mission of the institution. At the administrative level of the university, these costs are acknowledged as acceptable. Jim Kuhlman was very clear. "That's not our job." "We're not that kind of institution." "You don't always end up with a consistent product." "I would choose to let the work and the experimentation go ahead and take the lumps. . . ."[109]

Everyone would rather have both the research value and the teaching and learning laboratory. Jim Kuhlman and Bryan Sinclair summed this wish up with a variation on a refrain that is familiar to all librarians, "You do the best with what you have." The distribution of resources to Special Collections is not going to change anytime soon. Also, to most visitors coming to either the physical facility or the Special Collections website, the costs are not evident. The website is rich with finding aids, many of which include scalable images of documents; large photographic collections that are evident of collaborative efforts with other local institutions; and oral histories, among other materials. Perhaps what is lost is only lost to librarians and archivists. Bryan Sinclair made this point when talking about the lack of Special Collections records in the OPAC and referred to those things "we need to do for ourselves" but that don't "factor into the lives of our searchers." But the Collection is considering a reduction in services, and in positing a choice between devoting resources to UNCA students as opposed to others unconnected to the university, the cost of the choice may becoming more evident.

Many times I was told that if Special Collections can benefit the community at large, if Asheville and Buncombe residents come in, if scholars visit from far away and find useful materials, we are very pleased, but that is not why we are here. This is tangential to our mission. When the choice was described as being between serving publishers and others from the outside world trying to get images and putting more emphasis on working with UNCA students, the choice seemed to be missing something. From a Special Collections perspective, the missing element was consideration for the materials themselves.

This study has to do with the challenges facing special collections, the perspectives and efforts brought to these challenges by the ARL, and the differences between these perspectives and those belonging to a specific non-ARL special collection at the UNCA library. In this case, the root of the difference lies in the choice that the university and, therefore, the library have made to focus emphatically on undergraduate education. With this choice, other valuable goals and missions are, necessarily, either excluded or deemed to be less essential. Certainly at at time when hard fiscal choices need to be made, these other goals and missions will be regarded as secondary considerations at best. Special Collections at UNCA is a valued unit of the library as a teaching/learning laboratory. The specific materials contained at Special Collections, are, however, secondary. That there are materials collected, maintained, and presented in such a way that students can experience them, work with them, value them, and even learn something about how Special Collections function—these are the essential elements. But for these purposes, another group of materials would serve just as well. More than anything else, this factor defines, at its core, the difference between what occurs at UNCA Special Collections and that which occurs at an ARL library collection. It defines the context out of which challenges arise and accounts for the difference between the challenges that do arise.

Helen Wykle was very clear about the nature of the challenges facing Special Collections: how to balance growth against static resources, and having to face this challenge in the context of an administration that does not fully understand the significance, for her, of that initial challenge. Another way of understanding this is to suggest that for the Coordinator of Special Collections, the materials themselves have intrinsic and research value that the greater institution simply cannot afford. The challenge lies in continuing to recognize that value—a necessity for any curator, archivist, or coordinator of a special collection, I would imagine—while working with constraints that render that value expendable. This challenge supercedes, if at times overwhelms, all other challenges, including those identified by the ARL.

The central charge given to the ARL Task Force on Special Collections, that which provided the framework for all of that group's activities was to promote special collections as fundamental to the mission of the research library. Special Collections at UNCA is committed to the valuable mission of its institution, but in that commitment is a tension between collecting for the sake of teaching and learning and collecting for research. Therein lies the difference and the challenge.

* * * * *

In choosing to look at the challenges facing Special Collections at one specific institution, no claim is being made that these circumstances exist at any other. By investigating in this way, the study produced is markedly different than one seeking similar goals by interviewing only curators or coordinators of special collections at several small universities. That would be an interesting project, as well. I have sought to present a fuller portrait of the operation at UNCA in order to learn more about the complex relations within the library that help give definition to those challenges at this single site.

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Appendix A: Interview Script

(Note: Several of these questions will be more appropriate for some interviewees than for others.)

Beginning most broadly, how would you describe the challenges currently facing Special Collections at UNCA? What are your major concerns? How might you rank them in order of significance?

The ARL Task Force on Special Collections identified hidden collections--that is, uncataloged, unprocessed, or underprocessed archival, manuscript, and rare book materials--as a major problem area. How does your repository regard this matter and what steps have you been able to take in an effort to allieviate it or lessen its impact. What is the online status of finding aids?

Are your collections represented in your library's OPAC? What issues are involved? Please elaborate.

How have the conversations within the archival community regarding appropriate processing levels affected the activities at your repository? How do you view these issues with regard to your sense of your repository's mission, sense of public service, etc.

This repository (UNCA) has shown itself to be interested, in fact, eager, to explore the use of new tools that promise to either expand repository capabilites (ContentDM, for example) or increase repository effectiveness (Archivist's Toolkit). What has your experience been with regard to these attempts to implement new technologies?

What kind of strategic planning is being done at/with Special Collections?. . . with regard to its place within the library? How is strategic planning itself being viewed, in its relationship to the nature of the institution's mission and with regard to the carrying out of that mission?

Internal cooperation/collaboration between special collections, public service, and technical services is essential to a continued and smooth operation. What are the issues here that either enrich or restrict these relationships as they pertain to a more satisfactory fulfillment of your mission?

Allocation of resources is always a problem, one that has an impact on all aspects of a repository's operation. In specific and major ways, how has the allocation of resources had an impact on the services Special Collections has hoped to provide?

Public service is, in part, a matter of knowing who your users are. Could you speak to the ways in which you either do or do not adequately know your users. Would you like to see a standardized "instrument" among archives that would seek to measure and assess users' needs?

What changes are you seeing in the way Special Collections is being used, vis a vis the ways in which libraries themselves are changing?

Just for the record, what is the status of University Archives with regard to your special collections?

Have you been involved in conversations regarding special collections and the matter of a campus IR? At what stage are these conversations?

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Date
Name
Address
Address

Greeting

As part of the requirement for completing a Master of Library Science degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I am preparing a research paper on the challenges facing special collections today. The study will focus particularly in the areas of public access, service, and outreach, and will present its findings in the context of a literature on the subject led by the ARL's 2001–2007 Task Force on Special Collections. Please note, this project is a Research Study.

I would like to visit you in person at your workplace to ask you a series of questions about your institution's special collection, the challenges it faces, how these challenges are being experienced and determined, and the ways in which priorities among these matters are being set and addressed. These issues will include, but will not be limited to discussions of a changing technological landscape, changing relationships between special collections and the libraries of which they are a part, the necessity of altering decades-old methods of processing collections, and new ways to think about collaboration both within and between institutions.

With your permission, I would like make an audio recording of the interview. I expect the interview to last from fifteen minutes to an hour, depending on the nature of your connection with the repository, with a possible follow-up for clarification of answers or comments.

There are no anticipated personal risks associated with your participation in this study. You can refuse to answer any question and may stop the interview at any time. Withdrawing from the interview will not result in any negative consequences for you. Your name will only be used in the study with your consent, however, due to the small sample size and the use of the institution's name, keeping your participation anonymous would be difficult. Should you grant this consent, be assurred that no identifying information beyond your name and institution will be used.

If you have any questions, I encourage you to contact me at marc@email.unc.edu or via phone at 919 933-1533. You may also contact my faculty advisor on this project, Timothy Pyatt, who may be reached at 919 684-8929 or at tpyatt@email.unc.edu. Other questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject may be directed, anonymously if you wish, to the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my project; I know that your time is valuable. Two copies of an Informed Consent Agreement are enclosed with this letter. If you choose to participate in my study, please sign one copy of the agreement and either return it by using the enclosed stamped and addressed envelope or, after communicating your willingness to participate, submit it at the time of our interview.

Sincerely,

Marc D. Brodsky
Master of Library Science Candidate
School of Information and Library Science
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Appendix C: Consent Form

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study # 07-1241
Consent Form Version Date: August 10, 2007

Title of Study: Special Collections—Challenges and Contexts: A Case Study

Principal Investigator: Marc D. Brodsky
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: School of Information and Library Science
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-933-1533
Faculty Advisor: Timothy Pyatt
Faculty Advisor email: tpyatt@email.unc.edu
Faculty Advisor phone: 919 684-8929
Funding Source: none

Study Contact telephone number: 919-933-1533
Study Contact email: marc@email.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researcher named above any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to investigate how special collections--particularly those at small universities--are setting and addressing priorities in the areas of public access, service, and outreach given a variety of urgent and contemporary challenges. To this end, I will conduct a case study of Special Collections at UNC, Asheville.
How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be one of between 4 and 8 people participating.

How long will your part in this study last?
Fifteen minutes to an hour, depending on the nature of your connection with the repository, for an in-person interview, with possible follow-up by phone, email, or in person for clarification of some answers or comments.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
I would like to visit you in person at your workplace to ask you a series of questions about your institution's special collection, the challenges it faces, and the ways in which priorities among these matters are being determined and addressed. With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of the interview. You will have the right to skip any question you choose not to answer for any reason. There is also the possibility that I may ask for clarification or more information after the interview, either by phone, by email, or in person.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?
Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. By participating in this study you may benefit by being informed of the ways and degrees to which issues regarding public access, service, and outreach at Special Collections may correspond to those described in the literature. These results may show differences between repositories based at small universities and those at larger research libraries. They may also provide a useful context against which various opinions and perspectives among the staff of the institution being studied may be viewed.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?
No risks to participants are anticipated, though there is always the slight risk of breach of confidentiality.

How will your privacy be protected?
The name of your employer will be revealed in the paper. Your name will only be used with your consent. Be advised that due to the small number of people being interviewed, even if you do not grant this consent, keeping your participation anonymous would be difficult. Again, there is a risk that you may be identitified as a participant in this study even if you do not grant permission to use your name, due to the small sample size involved. However, no identifying information beyond your name and institution will be used.

I would like to make an audio recording of our interview. If you consent to being recorded, you may request that the recorder be turned off at any time. The recordings will be for my use only, will not be shared with anyone, and will be destroyed once my paper is written. Any written transcript of the interview will be destroyed once my paper is completed.

I will be the only person with regular access to collected data. The only other person with whom this data may be shared will be my faculty advisor. For the duration of the study, all electronic notes and recordings stored on my laptop will be in my immediate possession for much of the time and will always be password protected by PGP software. All handwritten notes will either be in my immediate possession or in my work space, which is locked in my absence.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?
You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?
There will be no costs for being in the study

What if you are a UNC employee?
Taking part in this research is not a part of your University duties, and refusing will not affect your job. You will not be offered or receive any special job-related consideration if you take part in this research.

What if you have questions about this study?
You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researcher or the faculty advisor listed on the first page of this form.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

- -

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_ I give permission for the researcher to audio record the interview.

_ I do not give the researcher permission to audio record the interview.

_ YES, I do give permission for the researcher to use my name in any report or publication that may follow from this study.

_ NO, I do not give permission for the researcher to use my name in any report or publication that may follow from this study.

____________________________________ ________________
Signature of Research Participant Date

____
Printed Name of Research Participant